



10 OF THE Best SHORT TOURS

Take a tour without the time commitment, writes Laura French

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If you think escorted touring means embarking on a month-long adventure to Timbuktu, you might be right – but not always. Mini-adventures are on the rise thanks to time-strapped travellers whose desire to see the world is as strong as their flat white coffee on a Monday morning. And for those people, there's the short tour.

Spanning everything from Christmas markets in Europe to Kruger National Park, Cambodia and the Grand Canyon, there are trips available to suit every age and agenda – and many can be done in fewer than five nights.

Here we round up a few of the best to get you feeling inspired, whether you sell them as a holiday in themselves or a handy add-on to a longer trip.

1 SALKANTAY TREK TO MACHU PICCHU

Everyone's heard of Machu Picchu – and rightly so, with its mystical clouds, towering rocks and ancient Incan history. But not everyone's heard of the Salkantay, an alternative to the Inca Trail that's just as spectacular, with snow-capped mountains, verdant cloud forest and kaleidoscopic lagoons to greet those up for a challenge.

G Adventures offers a five-day round-trip from Cusco that is well worth recommending to active types after a quieter hike. It features three days of trekking, during which clients will reach a 4,600m pass overlooking the snow-speckled peak of

Salkantay, the highest in the Vilcabamba range. They'll catch the train to Aguas Calientes before exploring the 'lost city' of Machu Picchu on the final day, taking a guided tour to learn more about the mysterious history behind the settlement the Spanish never found.

Book it: From £549 for a five-day trek from Cusco, including a local guide, cooks, porters, transport, most meals, two nights in hotels and two nights' camping.
gadventures.co.uk

2 LAS VEGAS TO THE GRAND CANYON

From the glaring lights of Sin City to the soaring, multi-coloured rock formations of the surrounding canyons, the American Wild West is a land of contrasts.

TrekAmerica's four-day mini trip takes in the best of them, leading guests into the verdant landscapes of Zion National Park – where they'll have the chance to hike the iconic Angels Landing, a challenging climb surrounded by plunging green slopes and other-worldly rocks – before moving on to Bryce Canyon, characterised by towering, spiky orange 'hoodoos' and bottle-green pines.

Next up is Monument Valley, a 12,000-hectare Navajo reserve where they'll ride on a 4x4 and sleep in a traditional hogan mud hut. The trip culminates with a stop at the Grand Canyon for an optional helicopter ride over the rainbow-coloured, 277-mile long formation, before returning

to Las Vegas. Bucket list ticks all round.

Book it: From £549 including two nights' camping, one night in a hogan, most meals, a tour leader, private transport and some activities.
trekamerica.co.uk

3 HIGHLAND ADVENTURE

For travellers not wanting to venture too far afield, the Scottish Highlands are a winner – and there's no better way to experience their lush, rolling landscapes than on a classic steam train.

Great Rail Journeys' five-day Highland Adventure gives clients a chance to do just that, with trips on the funicular Cairngorm Mountain Railway, the Kyle Line and Strathspey Steam Railway, as well as the iconic Jacobite Steam Train.

Travelling to and from Inverness, passengers will glimpse Eilean Donan Castle, Ben Nevis, the arches of the Glenfinnan Viaduct and Fort William, before ambling past lochs and soaring mountains around the Kyle of Lochalsh.

Louise Heatley, head of product and contracting, says: "Scotland truly excels at scenic rail journeys, and the route taken by the Jacobite Steam Train is regarded as one of the finest. The train recaptures the golden era of steam railway and it's my favourite part of this tour."

Book it: From £595, with departure dates running from August to October 2017.
greatrail.com

4 BATTLEFIELDS OF FRANCE & FLANDERS

For history-loving clients looking for a meaningful trip, a battlefields tour can be an excellent option – and since 2018 marks the centenary of the end of the First World War, now's a good time to start selling them.

Travelsphere's Battlefields of France & Flanders trip is a worthy suggestion, with four days spent exploring Ypres and the surrounding area, including the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Flanders Field Museum and Tyne Cot Cemetery, as well as a moving experience at the Last Post Ceremony.

It's all based at one hotel, so it's a good idea for those not wanting to pack up and move on each morning, and a quick Eurostar hop from London reduces the hassle factor even further.

Book it: The four-day tour costs from £499 including the services of a tour manager, return travel by Eurostar and three nights' accommodation on a B&B basis.
travelsphere.co.uk

5 CLASSIC CAMBODIA

Incredible temples, amazing landscapes, fascinating history and welcoming people put Cambodia high on the list for travellers wanting a slice of authentic culture.

Wendy Wu Tours' short stay here sandwiches a trip to the world-famous Angkor Wat – the world's largest religious



LEFT:
Ormiston
Gorge, West
MacDonnell
Ranges,
Australia

RIGHT:
Phnom
Penh,
Cambodia

BELOW:
Jökulsárlón
glacier
lagoon,
Iceland



→ monument, dating back to the 12th century – between the intriguing cities of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh.

Home to the Killing Fields and Tuol Sleng Museum, the capital city provides a vivid insight into the country's moving history under the Khmer Rouge, which clients will learn more about before embarking on a sunset cruise on the Mekong River. In Siem Reap, they'll explore the historic temples of Banteay Srei and Banteay Samre, travelling by speedboat on Tonle Sap lake (when the water is high, between August and February).

Book it: From £670 between April 18 and December 18, based on two sharing. The price includes domestic transport, private guides, accommodation, some meals and entrance fees.
wendywutours.co.uk



With lunar landscapes, glacial lagoons and active volcanoes, it's not hard to see why Iceland is a best-seller



ICELAND'S NORTHERN LIGHTS

Iceland continues to be a best-seller across the board, and with its lunar landscapes, glacial lagoons and active volcanoes, it's not hard to see why.

Kirsi Jokela, product manager for Best Served Scandinavia, says: "The country is expecting to hit more than two million visitors this year, so booking in advance

will become more important to secure spots on tours in the region."

The operator's five-day itinerary through the country takes in Reykjavik, the Golden Circle and Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon, stopping at various waterfalls, hot springs and glaciers along the way.

It's topped off with some time in Thingvellir National Park – a craggy geological masterpiece and the place where the world's oldest existing parliament first assembled – as well as a visit to an Icelandic farm and an evening lecture, complete with a northern lights hunt.

Book it: Best Served Scandinavia's five-day Iceland's Northern Lights holiday starts at £965, with departures from October onwards. The price includes return flights,

accommodation, a local guide and entrance fees.

best-served.co.uk



OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

If clients are looking for vast wilderness, extraordinary landscapes and ultimate peace, nothing quite beats the Australian outback. Recommend Cox & Kings' four-night small-group tour for those wanting to get stuck in. From watching the sun set over the red mammoth of Uluru to tucking into traditional bush food in Alice Springs, participants will learn everything there is to know about Aboriginal culture, with indigenous guides there to provide first-hand insight.

Among the highlights is a four-course dinner under the desert moon at Kings Canyon, home to a domed 'lost city', →



→ a visit to the Henbury Meteorites Conservation Reserve, where 12 craters were formed when a meteor landed 4,700 years ago, and a stop in the West MacDonnell Ranges, where bright-green ferns sit in front of vivid-red sandstone rocks.

Book it: From £1,575, including accommodation, transfers, guides, entrance fees and most meals.

coxandkings.co.uk

8 CHRISTMAS MARKETS

There's something magical about Europe's Christmas markets – wafts of cinnamon, fairy-lit chalets and illuminated ice rinks – and nowhere does them quite like Belgium.

For clients keen on squeezing a few into one trip, suggest Newmarket Holidays' three-day Brussels, Bruges and Ghent Christmas Markets itinerary, which leaves ample time for exploring the cities alongside the festivities themselves.

Highlights include a spectacular Sound and Light

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Show in Brussels' Grand Place, strolls along the picturesque waterways of Ghent, and time to browse the market on the Simonsteven Plein in Bruges, where delightfully presented Belgian chocolates sit beside handmade decorations and other sweet treats. Clients will be collected from their chosen pick-up point, so it's an easy option for a long weekend.

Book it: From £179, based on a December 8 departure. The price includes half-day visits to the markets, two nights' B&B in a three-star hotel, return Channel crossings, coach travel and a tour manager.

newmarketholidays.co.uk



RIGHT:
Kruger
National
Park, South
Africa

BELOW:
Christmas
markets,
Belgium



9 PETRA AND THE DEAD SEA

For those with a hankering for history, suggest Jordan. Home to the ancient sandstone city of Petra – lost to the outside world until it was rediscovered in 1812 – it provides an intriguing snapshot into the past that adventurous types can take in on a flying visit with On The Go Tours' Short Stay trip in the region.

Alongside Petra, the four-day trip takes in the likes of Modaba and its ancient mosaics; the imposing Shobak Castle, a throwback to the days of the Crusaders; Beidha neolithic village, home to a plethora of tombs and temples; and Mount Nebo, which is regarded as one of the country's most sacred sites and overlooks the Promised Land. Guests will also get the chance to float starfish-style in the Dead Sea, soaking up its minerals, before hopping on a plane home.

Book it: From £785 including transfers, guided tours, entrance fees, three nights' B&B in four-star hotels and transport.

onthegotours.com

10 KRUGER EXPERIENCE

Take the big five, add giraffes, wild dogs and more than 500 species of birds, then throw in mile upon mile of savannah, traditional cuisine and starry skies. What do you get? Kruger National Park – and it needn't be reserved for those with all the time in the world on their hands. A minimal time difference plus direct flights mean it's more than doable as a short break, or as the beginning of a longer South African adventure.

For a whistle-stop trip in the region, look to Intrepid Travel's four-day itinerary, which includes a full-day game drive through the park alongside an evening drive, morning bush walk and various optional activities. Guests will dine under the stars while staying at a cosy lodge, before heading back to Johannesburg – ideal for those wanting to combine a safari with a cultural break.

Book it: From £420 including three nights' accommodation in a lodge, daily game drives, nature walks, transport to and from Johannesburg and most meals.

intrepidtravel.com

